

Uniform statutory county courts
(HB 36, by A. Hill et al.)

DIGEST: This bill would have changed the name of all existing county-courts-at-law to circuit courts. The circuit courts would have had uniform jurisdiction and procedure, subject to specific exceptions.

GOVERNOR'S
REASON FOR
VETO:

The bill contains technical errors and invites different interpretations concerning judges' salaries and the jurisdiction of the circuit courts. The bill does not adequately address the existing confusing and varying laws on statutory county courts.

SPONSOR'S
VIEW:

Rep. Hill said she understood the reasons for the veto. The bill passed on the last night of the session and several last-minute amendments were added that created constitutional problems. She said the problems are being solved and she will reintroduce the bill in the next special session.

NOTES: The HSG analysis of this bill appeared in the May 2 Daily Floor Report.

Bidding on state employees' group-insurance contract
(HB 149, by Presnal)

DIGEST: The bill would have required the trustees of the Employee Retirement System to take competitive bids on the state's group insurance plan only once every six years, instead of once every three. It would also have removed the current requirement that trustees take bids each time a change in the amount or type of coverage occurs.

GOVERNOR'S
REASONS
FOR VETO:

The bill would have reduced competition for the state's group-insurance contract by allowing ERS to take bids less often. Since health-care costs are uncertain and a bid would have to cover six years' anticipated cost increases, the bill would also generate inflated bids and thus higher premiums.

SPONSOR'S

VIEW:

Rep. Presnal said the Governor's office did not understand the bill and called the veto "unfortunate." Under HB 149, ERS could take bids every year, he said, but could also keep a contract for as long as six years. He said the current system had already eliminated competition, noting that the most recent request for bids had netted ERS only one bid. "I guess the message never did get across," Presnal said. "It's just a case of falling through the cracks in the Governor's office."

NOTES:

The HSG analyzed HB 149 in the April 25 Daily Floor Report.

Juror pay in Harris County
(HB 186, by Green)

DIGEST:

The bill would have permitted the commissioners court in a county with more than two million residents (Harris County) to establish a special juror-payment account. This would have required the recommendation of the majority of the district judges in the county. The district clerk would have used the account to pay jurors without a countersignature from the county treasurer or auditor.

GOVERNOR'S

REASONS

FOR VETO:

By entrusting all county funds to the county treasurer current law provides an excellent system of checks and balances. This bill would not provide enough safeguards in removing control of certain county funds from the hands of the official who was elected for that purpose.

SPONSOR'S

VIEW

"This was a fight between the district clerk and the county treasurer," according to Rep. Green, "and the Governor chose to side with the county treasurer." Green said he was disappointed because the bill would have speeded up payment to jurors and saved money for the taxpayers of Harris County.

NOTES:

The analysis of HB 186 appeared in the March 3 Daily Floor Report.